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AUTHOR Kumagai, Gloria L.
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ABSTRACT

Asian women have been in the United States for over one hundred and twenty years. They are, however, still victims of both sexual and racial stereotyping, the "cheap labor" syndrome, and are denied the opportunity to learn about their own history, heritage, and culture. Traditional female roles among Asian immigrants and a legacy of discriminatory attitudes have been largely responsible for the low status position of Asian women in American society and in their own ethnic groups. Despite the fact that increasing numbers of Asian women enter the U.S. labor market, their wages are below the median for white women and men and they tend to be underemployed in light of their educational background. In addition, a lack of positive role models, media reinforcement of prevailing attitudes and stereotypes, and the double burden of sexism and racism have contributed to the different experiences of Asian women and white women. In order to rectify this situation, these differences need to be acknowledged and understood. Educational institutions can play a role in this by reexamining such things as textbook bias, multicultural curriculums, bilingual educational programs, teacher awareness, parent communication, and the implementation of programs such as Title VII and Title IX. (Author/EB)

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THE ASIAN WOMAN IN AMERICA

by
Gloria L. Kumagai

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The Asian Woman in America

By Gloria L. Kumagai

Both females and males, regardless of their racial ethnic group, are seriously limited in their information about Asian women. Far too often, the system educates individuals about race and sex as two distinct and separate categories. Consequently, Asian women, as well as other women of color, are viewed either as members of their ethnic group or their sexual group; and rarely as members of both groups simultaneously. This paper presents an overview of the historical context and the present day status of Asian women in America as well as implications for education and change.

Historical Perspective

Asian women have been in the United States for over one hundred and twenty years. Their roots were started in the 1850's when a large influx of Chinese came into this country. These immigrants entered the United States with hopes of earning enough money so that they could return to China and buy land. They had no intention to reside permanently in this country. Natural catastrophies of flood and famine and the political disasters of unrest and rebellion in China were factors causing the Chinese to seek their fortunes overseas. Within this mass movement, there were few Chinese women. In fact, by 1890, there was only 3,868 Chinese females compared to 102,620 Chinese males (Jung, 1974).

One of the inevitable conditions resulting from the disproportionate sex ratio between the Chinese male and Chinese female was prostitution. According to Jung, several hundred Chinese prostitutes arrived by ship from Hong Kong as early as 1852:

> The majority of these women were not originally prostitutes but had been sold to men in Hong Kong who later forced them into prostitution (Jung, 1974).

This condition existed through the years. In the late 1880's and early 1900's the Chinese women in the United States were severely oppressed as they were used as mere slaves and sexual commodities.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prohibited the entry of Chinese women who were not the wives of classes of Chinese exempt from the Act. Those classes were merchants, students and teachers. Since the bulk of Chinese immigrants were laborers, their wives, if they were married, were not allowed to immigrate. This situation further added to the imbalanced sex ratio. In addition, states passed miscegenation laws which prevented Chinese males from intermarrying with white females. The result was that Chinese immigrant men lived out lonely, desolate lives in this country while attempting to amass their fortunes. The development of a Chinese bachelor society was a product of the imbalanced sex ratio.

Chinese women were permitted to enter this country in 1943 when the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was repealed. Amendments to the Immigration Act of 1924 and the War Brides Act of 1947 promoted family unity and helped to equalize the sex ratio in the Chinese American population. However, this population is still experiencing the consequences of the Exclusion Act as reflected in the highly imbalanced sex ratio in certain age categories.

The life of Chinese immigrant women in this country has been described by Jen:

> Once settled in America, the Chinese immigrant mother is faced with the economic struggle of survival in a strange, hostile country. She is too often the "cheap labor" for white America's ruling class...sewing a $50.00 dress for 50¢, washing dishes at a "cheap" Chinese restaurant, making beds for tourists in a luxury hotel, or keeping house for those who just "love their industrious, amusing Chinese domestics" (Jen, 1971).

The lives of Chinese immigrant women have been patterned on the Confucian ethic - to serve their fathers in youth, husbands in marriage and their sons in old age. The basic elements of Chinese society were filial piety and the strong family unit. Consequently, Chinese women have sacrificed for their

families without complaint because all of their hopes have been and are expressed through their children. Their individuality becomes defined in terms of their role within the family and the family's position within society:

> She demands from her daughters and daughters-in-law subserviance to their husbands' careers and wishes. 'It is the woman and her mother who is chastised when her home, cooking, or children are unpleasant", she tells us. And when either sons or daughers are involved in politics, she implores us not to challenge the authorities. When we protest against the racist war or go on strike for Asian studies programs, she cries and tells us that we must be faithful to the welfare of our family, that all else is beyond our concern (Jen, 1971).

The cultural values of passivity and submission are passed on to Chinese American females who are born in this country.

The immigration of Japanese women was similar to that of Chinese women in that very few came during the late 1800's. However, unlike the Chinese pattern, Japanese women began coming in a continuous stream from 1900-1920. The reason for this difference was that many young Japanese male immigrants began to bring over wives. Census figures show that in 1900, there were 985 females out of a total Japanese population of 24,326; and by 1920, there were 22,193 women out of a total Japanese population of 111,010 (Gee, 1974).

The "picture bride" practice was the major way for single Japanese male immigrants to acquire wives. This practice was an extension of the traditional arranged marriage system in Japan:

> Picture bride marriages grew out of the omiai-kekkon or arranged marriage. An agreed upon go-between or go-betweens carried out the negotiations between Japanese families through the selection process, and the initial customary meeting or omiai between prospective brides and bridegrooms often was preceded by an exchange of photographs, especially in cases in which the families were separated by long distance. Apart from the fact that the partners to a union neither met during the course of negotiations nor were both present at the wedding ceremony, the picture bride marriage satisfied all the recognized social conventions regarding marriage in Japan (Gee, 1974).

Picture bride marriages were perceived by the surrounding dominant white society as "an immoral social custom antithetical to American Christian ideals"

(Gee, 1974). Whites rationalized that because Japanese immigrants participated in such a degrading practice, they would never be able to assimulate or "melt" into the mainstream of the United States. Claims, such as these, led to the Japanese government discontinuing the issuance of passports to picture brides in 1920. This act "along with the subsequent 1924 Immigration Act left 42.5 percent of the adult Japanese males still single in America with no hopes of getting married" (Gee, 1974).

The overall importance of the immigration of Japanese women was that they made the Japanese American family unit possible. This unit produced children who were born in the United States and were U.S. citizens by birth. This second generation represented "the transition from a society of single male sojourners to permanent immigrants" (Gee, 1974).

Japanese pioneer women in the United States are known as Issei, referring to first generation present in this country. These Issei women did not lead an easy life. They immediately began to work alongside their husbands because of constant deprivation and the need for money. One woman recounted:

> At the beginning I worked with my husband picking potatoes or onions and putting them in sacks. Working with rough-and-tumble men, I became weary to the bones; waking up in the mornings I could not bend over the wash basin.
>
> Sunlight came out about 4:00 a.m. during the summer in the Yokima Valley. I arose at 4:30. After cooking breakfast, I went out to the fields. There was no electric stove or gas like now. It took over one hour to cook, burning kindling wood (Gee, 1974).

The responsibilities of child-bearing and housekeeping were additional burdens for Issei women. Childbirth was probably the greatest hardship due to the lack of professional health care. For example, doctors were not readily available in rural areas where immigrants lived, were too expensive or would not treat Japanese women. Thus, the alternatives were to deliver by one's self or use the services of a midwife.

> Post-natal recuperation was a luxury, in most households. Since wives were economic units crucial to the family incomes, they often worked until the day of childbirth and were working within three days afterwards (Fujitomi and Wong, 1973).

Child-raising usually was the sole responsibility of women as a result of the distinct sexual division of labor within the home. One Issei woman recalled:

> My husband is a Meiji man. He did not think of helping in the house or with the children. No matter how busy I may have been, he never changed the baby's diapers. Though it may not be right to say this ourselves, we Issei pioneer women from Japan worked solely for our husbands. At mealtime, whenever there was not enough food, we served a lot to our husbands and took very little for ourselves (Gee, 1974).

Japanese pioneer women were extraordinary women. They had the physical stamina and moral courage to persist and survive from the time they left Japan through their adaptation to life in America. They had the strength to survive despite the formidable conditions in which they lived and faced each day.

Second generation Japanese women in America are called Nisei. Both Issei and Nisei women went through upheaval from their homes and communities and relocation to concentration camps in this country during World War II. Cultural values of submission and passivity have persisted in forming the lives of Nisei women:

> Duty and obligation continue to guide the Nisei woman's behavior and lifestlle. As a young girl, she was raised to become a respectful wife and good mother to her sons. Getting a college education was not important, so only a minority of the Nisei women have college degrees. Today, the Nisei women, typically, hold occupations as factory workers, waitresses, secretaries, nurses, and teachers. The major concern of the Nisei women is their families. Like the Issei family, the Nisei family is vertically structured. The husband is the decision maker, the head of the household...Mothers continue to live vicariously through their children, encouraging all of them, regardless of sex, to pursue, at least, a college degree. In order to keep their children through school, the Nisei women will sacrifice their own luxuries to provide the children with the opportunities denied themselves (Fujitomi and Wong, 1973).

The behaviors and lifestyles of Nisei women have influenced Japanese American women of the third and fourth generations.

Besides Asian women of Chinese and Japanese ancestry, there are other women of Asian ancestry in this country, i.e. Korean, Pilipino, Vietnamese, South Sea Islands, and Hawaiian. Early immigration patterns of these groups are similar to those of the Chinese and Japanese: men came first and in greater numbers than women.

Today Asians comprise the second largest ethnic group immigrating to the United States. Therefore a proportion of Asian women in this country are foreign-born. For these women, the basic struggle for survival is often complicated by their inadequate language skills in English and they are limited to Asian ghetto areas where their native languages are spoken.

Many aspects of the history of Asian American women in this country are still ongoing. For example, Asian immigrants as well as citizens are still victims of the "cheap labor" syndrome. The importance of knowing about history is that much of it defines the present situation of Asian American women.

Employment

Although the 1970 Census reported that Asian Americans have higher educational levels than white Americans, the reality of the situation is that Asian Americans tend to be underemployed. They are not in job positions which are commensurate to their levels of education. Often times Asian Americans will be maintained in entry level jobs for years. When employers have been asked the reasons for non-promotion, typical responses are: "They lack aggression, they're too quiet, they're passive."

Asian women have increasingly entered the job market. 1970 Census data revealed that between 1960 and 1970, the labor force participation rate of Chinese women increased from 44% to 50%, with the greatest increase occurring in the working patterns of married women (1960 - 13%, 1970 - 48%) (1970 Census). Labor force participation rates of other groups of Asian women in this country are:

Group	1960	1970	
Japanese	44%	50%	
Pilipino	36%	55%	
Korean	*	42%	* Data not available in 1960 Census
Hawaiian	*	48%	

The labor force participation rate of Pilipino women is the highest nationally for any group of women. (41% of all women are in the labor force according to the 1970 Census.)

Although the labor force participation rates of foreign-born and U.S.-born Chinese women are approximately the same, there is a distinct difference in the kind of jobs which they hold:

> Over half of all employed U.S.-born Chinese women are employed as typists, secretaries, sales clerks and other low status white-collar workers. Less than a quarter of employed foreign-born Chinese women are found in these occupations. 37% of the foreign-born Chinese women are working factory-related blue-collar jobs (most of them as semi-skilled operatives). A mere 9% of the U.S.-born Chinese women are employed in such occupations (1970 Census, 1974).

This pattern of U.S.-born Asian women being found in white-collar occupations - chiefly as clerical workers - and foreign-born Asian women in blue-collar jobs - is found with women of Japanese descent. For Pilipino women, the occuaptional pattern varies from area to area. In Hawaii, the majority are employed in blue-collar jobs; in California, they are in low-status white-collar jobs; and outside of California, the majority of Pilipino women are employed as professionals. It should be noted that Pilipino women in general, are much better educated than their male counterparts and the proportion of Pilipino women with a college education (27%) is the highest for any population groups, male or female (U.S. Census, 1974). Despite the facts that Pilipino women are highly educated and in the work force, their median income levels are only slightly higher than those of other women. Of all Pilipino women, 56% have an income less than $4,000, a very high percentage of low-income earners (U.S. Census, 1974).

Although there are large numbers of Asian women in the labor market, they tend to be found in either low-status white-collar jobs or blue-collar

work. Their occupational status is, also, reflected in the median wages of full-time, year round Asian American female workers:

Group	Wage
White men	$7,391
White women	$4,777
Pilipino women	$3,513
Japanese women	$3,236
Chinese women	$2,686
Hawaiian women	$2,931
Korean women	$2,741

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Statistical Abstract of the United States (1971); Negro Population (1973); Persons of Spanish Origin (1973); Japanese, Chinese and Pilipinos in the United States (1973).

In general, there has been an increasing number of Asian women entering the labor market in this country. U.S.-born Asian women are found in white-collar - clerical - jobs and foreign-born Asian women are found in blue-collar occupations. Their wages are below the median for white women and men and they tend to be underemployed in light of their educational background.

Stereotyping

Asian American women are victims of both sexual and racial stereotyping - a position of double jeopardy. The most common stereotypes are:

a. The docile, submissive Asian female who makes the perfect wife.

b. The exotic sex-pot who will cater to the whims of any man. Epithets are Suzy Wong, dragon lady and geisha girl.

These stereotypes have often been viewed as positive by both females and males. However, the use of them is negative in that such stereotypes do not permit people to perceive and deal with Asian American women as real human beings with ideas, aspirations, talents, and feelings. Thus, they are denied respect and dignity.

Women of Asian ancestry have been stereotyped since they immigrated to this country. Chinese immigrant women are viewed as degraded animal-like creatures. Negative perceptions of these women were formed during the anti-Chinese period of 1870-1900 in America. At later times, these views were

directed toward women of other Asian groups when they entered this country.

After World War II, U.S. soldiers brought back the impressions of Japanese women as perfect wives - domestic and excellent homemakers. This image has been generalized onto Japanese American women as well as other Asian American women. The belief that Asian American women are the same as Asian women in Asia is not only illogical, it is clearly operative and discriminatory. Asian American women are distinct from Asian women in Asia, but are not perceived to be distinct by people in this country.

An interesting aspect of the stereotypes about Asian American females is that they are either positive or negative depending largely upon how favorably their particular ethnic group is being viewed by others. Thus, during the anti-Chinese period in this country, stereotypes of Chinese women were highly negative as they were for Japanese American females during World War II; after World War II the stereotypes became "positive" for Japanese American women as they did for Chinese American women after Richard Nixon's visit to China in the early 1970's. These negative and positive stereotypes are paradoxical and were most recently encountered during the Vietnam War and the influx of refugees to this country.

The media has reinforced to a great extent the prevailing attitudes and stereotypes of Asian Americans during a given period. At the present, there are two major roles for Asian American women in the movies and television shows. They either fall under the Suzy Wong category or the passive, docile and accommodating woman. Since there is a lack of Asian American females in a variety of other roles and job positions in the media industry, there are few positive role models for Asian American females, young and old. This aspect is especially detrimental to the self-concept of these individuals.

Differences From White Women

There are distinct differences between Asian American and white women in this country. Some of the differences were described in previous sections of this paper. According to Chen, the differences stem from the fact that "many Asian women have faced discrimination not only as women, but also on the basis of race, cultural background or low socio-economic status" (Chen, 1976). Issues of race and class are intertwined with the questions of female roles and identity. Asian American women have a double burden to face: sexism and racism. This aspect has contributed to the different experiences encountered and faced by Asian and white women. For example, labor conditions and legislation improved for white women in the U.S. when it began to use the labor of women and men in Third World countries; Asian American women have and do make lower incomes than white women; Asian women have been hired to clean other people's homes and to serve other people's hors d'oeuvres so that white women could do community work and become emancipated (Loo, 1973). Just these differences alone make it imperative that white women face and deal with their own racism in regard to Asian American and other minority women in their fight for sexual equality in this country. The women's movement at the present is white and middle-class and does not concern itself with the needs and concerns of minority women.

Asian American women face sex-role stereotyping and discrimination in this society and they, also, face sex-role stereotyping and discrimination as found in the cultures of their particular ethnic groups. Within her own family, the Asian American female is often delegated a lower status than the male. This lower status and the view of women being passive, submissive and modest have their roots in Asia and were transported to this country by Asian immigrants. This sex-role stereotyping has shaped the lives of many Asian women who have been socialized into perceiving their role as inferior to men. In her struggle to become a leader or to be successful, her own

people may be against her. To be effective, she must be aggressive and assertive which is contrary to the Asian values of passivity and submission; and "in being effective, she, often, becomes highly visible and public, which is contrary to traditional Asian values of modesty and moderation" (Fujitomi and Wong, 1973).

In summary, the basic differences between Asian American and white women are:

1. A historical difference in experiences as white women have been included by society and the pwer structure to receive benefits while excluding minority females and males.
2. Asian American females have been stereotyped and discounted by society while white women, in spite of sex-role stereotyping, have occupied a position on the pedestal.
3. Asian American females must deal with both racism and sexism while white women are faced with sexism.

These differences need to be acknowledged and understood in order for both groups of women to work cooperatively in the women's movement. Unless this is done, the contributions and aspirations of Asian American women will not be reflected in the women's movement in this country.

Implications for Education and Change

Reviewing both the historical context and the present results in several implications for educators. The first derives from the fact that Asian women do not want to give up their culture. They need further information about their cultural heritage so that they can better understand themselves. One can easily respond to this need by stating, "Multicultural curriculum." However, multicultural curriculum that has been developed has not included ethnic women to any great extent. There are probably several reasons for this omission:

1. The trend to examine curriculum and instructional materials for racism and/or sexism often ignores women of color, especially when they are given little opportunity for input in designing criteria and guidelines as well as in screeening for bias.
2. The trend to develop curriculum inclusive of minorities and/or women usually means "women" refers to white females only and "minorities" refers to males.
3. The decisions regarding curriculum are usually in the hands of whites and, in most instances white males, so that multicultural curriculum is a low priority especially when the public is demanding that education get "back to the basics."

Consequently, Asian women, as well as other women of color, have been denied the opportunity to learn about themselves. In addition, all other students have been denied the opportunity to learn about the history, heritage, culture, and contributions of Asian women in the United States as well as in the world.

Educational institutions may provide some basic awareness of racism and sexism. However, students are not exposed to the interrelationships between these two kinds of oppression. As a result, both students and staff tend to see them as separate and, once again, women of color are ignored. In many school systems, dealing with racism is the responsibility of one designated department and dealing with sexism is the responsibility of another. Cooperation and sharing in problem-solving are not promoted by such arrangements.

Instructional materials, such as textbooks, have traditionally omitted information on Asian Americans. In recent years, textbook publishers have included aspects of Asian American history and culture. These materials need to be examined for bias. Often times, the history included on Asian Americans is incomplete or reinforces the model minority stereotype of Asians in America. Children's books on Asian Americans, also, need to be examined for bias as many of them misinform readers about Asian American culture.

Multicultural curriculum can legitimize the culture of Asian women by including information about their community, history, culture, leaders, and language. The present curriculum either omits these aspects or includes limited information--such as descriptions of Asian holidays. There is a need for sensitive and supportive personnel to integrate Asian American curriculum into the on-going classroom and school curricula.

Since Asians have increasingly immigrated to this country in recent years, more non-English-speaking Asian children have entered the public schools. These students are often denied equal rights in education. The Lau vs. Nichols case established this fact in regard to non-English-speaking Chinese students in San Francisco in 1974. Non-English-speaking Asian students should not be required to gain English language skills at the expense of full participation in the educational process. Maintaining native language is just as important to maintaining one's culture as acquiring those English language skills. Bilingual educational programs for such students are needed. These programs can be a bridge to gain equal access and participation in American society. In addition, bilingual communication between the school and home enables non-English-speaking parents to participate in their children's education.

In order for teachers to be able to teach Asian Americans as well as teach about them, in-service training is imperative. Teachers, administrators and other school personnel must become aware of Asian American history, heritage and culture and how to integrate them into the curriculum. They need to understand Asian values which influence the behavior of Asian students, especially females, so that they can begin to provide the environment and opportunities for open communication as well as for self-expressive and assertive behaviors. Too often, the stereotype of the Asian student as quiet, orderly and achieving results in teachers expecting and reinforcing only these behaviors in their Asian female students.

Another implication is that educational institutions and the culturally different Asian American community must develop continuous communication and stronger relations. Parent education to the educational process and schools' education to the Asian cultural process in America must be included as well as the resources within the Asian American community. The educational system can help the Asian female to develop herself to a good degree but without the expense of abandoning her culture.

The unshared power in educational institutions had led to inequitably distrubuted resources and the perpetuation of white middle-class values through institutionalized patterns and practices. The white male club has controlled facilities, jobs, new policies, and the implementation of laws, such as Title VII and Title IX. In order that Asian women are recognized and included in these areas, changes will be needed, such as:

1. Facilities

   Asian women must be able to use facilities on an equal basis with white males and females and ethnic males. In addition, Asian women should be given the opportunity for input in decision-making regarding the use of those facilities.

2. Jobs

   Asian women are in need of role models representing a broad range of jobs, including those which involve decision-making. They should be encouraged to seek out those jobs as well as be considered for them. Often times, Asian women are bypassed for promotions because they are perceived to be passive and submissive. Pertinent questions to think about are:

   a. To what extent have Asian women been restricted due to stereotypes of and expectations for them?

   b. To what degree has the institution offset those stereotypes and expectations by actively permitting and encouraging Asian women to hold leadership positions/roles?

3. New Policies

New policies should reflect the concerns of Asian women as well as their input. Policies should be both counter-racist and counter-sexist.

4. Implementation of Title VII

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended by the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 bans discrimination against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in all public and private educational institutions, state and local governments, and all employers, public or private, whether or not they receive any federal funds. The data on Asian women in the work force which was presented earlier in this paper provides proof that in spite of their educational levels, Asian women are still being discriminated against by their employers. Asian women must be included in affirmative action programs throughout this country. They must be actively recruited, hired, retained, and promoted for jobs. Employers should provide opportunities for Asian women to be self-expressive and assertive. Within educational institutions, it is imperative that Asian female students be exposed to Asian women who are in a wide range of job positions and who exhibit a range of expressive and assertive behaviors. Such role models are crucial for the self-concept and identity of Asian female students.

5. Implementation of Title IX

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 forbids discrimination on the basis of sex to students and employers in all federally assisted education programs in all institutions, public and private, which receive federal money through grants, loans or contracts. Title IX covers several areas in which the needs of Asian women should be included. Such areas are grievance processes, guidance

and counseling, physical education and athletics, and vocational education. In the area of guidance and counseling, personnel needs to be aware of and understand the sterotypes of Asian women. Stereotypes often creep into the counseling process and reflect the biases of the counselor and the institution. For Asian women, the negative images based on sexual and racial criteria hinder them from being exposed to a wide range of educational experiences at all levels of education. They are tracked into certain fields and disciplines. Usually, those areas are ones which require little aggressive verbal behavior. Quality staff development can begin to educate guidance counselors to the needs, status and aspirations of Asian women.

Basic to all the suggested changes mentioned is the fact that in order to include Asian women on an equal basis, power must be shared. Asian women must have input into decision-making and the implementation of those decisions. Cooperative relationships among Asian women, white males, white females, and other women and men of color must exist and serve as a model for students and staff. In our educational institutions, Asian women must be given the opportunity to learn about themselves and the opportunities to learn for themselves.

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